



COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION PLAN
FOR THE CITY OF SEABROOK, TX

FY2014/2015 to FY2017/2018

Comprehensive Communication Plan Outline

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City of Seabrook Vision

Seabrook is a sustainable, energetic and beautiful coastal community that embraces environmental stewardship, fosters safe neighborhoods and promotes tourism and economic diversity.

1. Introduction

Communication is a key component that is essential in achieving the City of Seabrook's Vision. The Comprehensive Communication Plan is an evolving document, which outlines the objectives and tactics needed to effectively inform and listen to the citizens, businesses and visitors of Seabrook.

Transparency

Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for the citizens, businesses and visitors of Seabrook. The City of Seabrook strives to ensure the public's trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation and collaboration. Timely, reliable and accurate communication is an integral part of achieving transparency.

2. Communications and Marketing Department

The City of Seabrook Communications and Marketing Department was created by the Seabrook City Council and Office of the City Manager in January 2012 when it became necessary to have a qualified staff manage the city's communication efforts. In the event that the Director of Communications or designated staff is unable to perform their assigned duties the Information and Technology Department staff will serve as a backup resource.

Department Mission

Inform and engage citizens, businesses and visitors by providing and responding with timely, reliable and accurate information.

Goals

Over the next 3 years the Communications and Marketing Department will:

- Ensure timely, reliable and accurate information dissemination and response
- Improve internal communication
- Increase citizen, business and visitor awareness and engagement
- Create and implement policy and procedures for existing and new technologies
- Generate measurement and data tools
- Promote tourism and economic development
- Develop an Emergency Communication Strategy

3. Organizational Framework

Seabrook is a coastal community located 30 minutes southeast of Houston with a population 12,000. The City of Seabrook is a small organization of approximately 100 employees at any given time.

City of Seabrook Mission

The City of Seabrook is responsive, innovative and fiscally sound in delivering services that preserve, protect and enhance quality of life.

City's Image

The City of Seabrook strives to establish and maintain a positive municipal image and identity. The organization embraces the city's image by providing management and education tools for city staff. The Communications and Marketing Department is responsible for administering the City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines, which ensure the City's brand is used appropriately and consistently across all communication platforms.

See Appendix A. City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines

Communication Consistency

It is essential to communicate information both internally and externally in a timely, reliable and accurate manner.

Internal Communication System

Information disseminated to the media and the public must originate from subject matter experts. When necessary subject matter experts may speak with the media. The City of Seabrook Information Experts document outlines the primary and alternate staff needed for information dissemination.

See Appendix B. City of Seabrook Information Experts

Publication Request and Media Relations

Local media dictate a strict publication schedule, which results in the need to promote and announce upcoming projects and events in a timely fashion. The Publication Request and Media Relations Guidelines outlines a schedule for information publication in addition to giving staff guidelines on how to appropriately interact with the media.

See Appendix C. Publication Request and Media Relations Guidelines

4. Website

The City of Seabrook's website, www.seabrooktx.gov, is the City's main portal of information. It is the responsibility of department managers to review and provide updated site information. Department staff may be trained as needed to ensure content is up-to-date. Content is maintained through a content management system provided by CivicPlus.

Objective

Establish policy and procedure to help dictate a method for updating, reviewing and posting information to the website while generating reports to measure website activities.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

Policy and Guidelines for City Website

Develop a policy intended to assist city staff who are responsible for posting and updating information to the website. This document will establish guidelines that will hold departments accountable while ensuring website content is posted in a timely, reliable and accurate fashion. The policy will include state and city charter mandated postings and publications of public meetings, agenda and financials.

Target Completion Date: January 2016

City Website Procedure – A How to on CivicPlus

Create a detailed procedure outlining how to use the CivicPlus Content Management System as a site administrator (2016).

Target Completion Date: January 2016

Website Analytics

Develop quarterly website analytic reports for City Council and management. Reports will vary each quarter based on popular and unpopular pages. Reports will be due at the beginning of January, April, July and October and will contain information regarding the previous three-month time period.

First Report Due: January 2015

5. Social Media

While print is an expensive communication channel, social media serves as an inexpensive form of communication with an extremely fast growing audience. The city's social media sites currently include:

- Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn

The City's social media networks are centralized and managed by the Guidelines, Best Practices and Policy for Social Media Use and was approved by Council in February 2012. *See Appendix D for the Guidelines, Best Practices and Policy for Social Media Use for the City of Seabrook.*

Objective

Ensure the City's social media sites are well maintained and updated with timely, accurate and reliable information and generate reports that will analyze the amount of social activity of each network.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

Step by Step on City Social Media Networks

Create a detailed procedure outlining how to log in and administer the city's social networks.

Target Completion Date: December 2015

LinkedIn

Work directly with Human Resources to start utilizing the City's LinkedIn account in a proactive fashion.

Target Completion Date: February 2015

Weekly Post Pledge

The Communications and Marketing Department pledges to make at least three (3) posts to both Facebook and Twitter each week.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

24-Hour Response Time

The Communications and Marketing Department is committed to listening to our social media audience and will review and if necessary respond to social media inquiries, comments and messages within 24 hours.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

Google+, YouTube and Emerging Social Networks

Create a Google+ page that is integrated with the City's YouTube channel. Identify city facilities and parks that need to have separate "Place" pages to properly rank in the Google search engine. Stay abreast of new and upcoming social media networks that may improve city communication efforts.

Target Completion Date: December 2015

Social Media Interaction Report

Develop a quarterly report that will track the number of "likes, posts, reach, tweets, retweets, favorites, etc" analyzing the amount and type of social interaction. Highlight "popular topics" that receive large impressions. Allow council and management to listen to interactions between the users and the city. Reports are due at the beginning of January, April, July and October and will contain information regarding the previous three-month time period.

First Report Due: January 2015

6. Channel 16

The 1984 Cable Act designated the City of Seabrook TV Channel as an official government access channel, funded in part by cable franchise fees. At this time Comcast is the only cable provider in the City of Seabrook and subscribers may view City of Seabrook programming on standard definition Channel 16.

Objective

Establish policy and procedure that guides staff in creating quality programming that is timely, reliable and accurate in addition to updating and purchasing technology in accordance with state law.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

Channel 16 Programming Guidelines and Policy

Develop a policy intended to assist city staff who are responsible for channel programming and scheduling. The policy will include state and city charter mandated postings and publications of public meetings, agenda and financials.

Target Completion Date: December 2015

Upgrade Broadcast System

Collaborate with the Information Technology Department to upgrade current broadcast machines to new Tightrope system.

Tactic Complete

Channel 16 Procedure – A Tightrope System Guide

Create detailed procedure on how to upload, schedule and create bulletin boards within the new broadcast system.

Target Completion Date: December 2015

PEG Funds and Equipment

Develop yearly PEG Fund expenditure budget. Develop a Communications and Marketing Equipment List.

Tactic Partially Complete - Target Completion Date: December 2014

7. Education and Outreach

The City of Seabrook offers citizens additional ways of staying informed and engaged through the use of email, print and person-to-person communication.

Objective

Maintain, improve and create new ways for citizens to interact with the City of Seabrook ensuring the exchange of information is timely, reliable and accurate.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

City Update – E-Newsletter

The E-Newsletter is a monthly email publication sent to a voluntary list serve.

Policy and Best Practices

Establish policy that guides staff in creating quality content that is timely, reliable and accurate including a yearly publication schedule.

Target Completion Date: June 2015

Publishing the City Update – A How to Guide

Develop a detailed procedure on how to create and publish the E-Newsletter.

Target Completion Date: June 2014

Quarterly Subscription Report

Run a subscription and interaction report that will be submitted to City Council and management at beginning of January, April, July and October and will contain information regarding the previous three-month time period.

First Report Due: January 2015

Printed Biannual City Report

The Biannual City Report is a printed publication mailed to all Seabrook residents and business and is released at the beginning of May and October each year.

Policy and Publication Guidelines for the Biannual City Report

Establish policy that guides staff in creating quality content that is timely, reliable and accurate including a yearly publication schedule.

Target Completion Date: November 2015

Survey

Develop a yearly survey that will analyze residents' response to the newsletter content. Survey will be made available online and distributed via email and social media each year in June.

Target Completion Date: June 2015

Seabrook Citizen's University

Develop a citizens program that allows citizens to interact directly with city departments.

Target Completion Date: January 2016

Citizen Engagement

Develop a marketing campaign to increase citizen engagement with City Council and city boards and commissions. This will include promoting existing public and special town hall meetings and elections in addition to researching and implementing new technology to gather citizens' input.

Target Completion Date: December 2016

8. Marketing

In addition to interacting with citizens, the Communications and Marketing Department is also responsible for managing tourism and HOT funds in addition to the promotion of the Seabrook

Economic Development Corporation. Several of the objectives and tactics above incorporate promotion of tourism and economic development.

Objective

Maintain and improve relationships with Seabrook hotels and business owners while providing timely, reliable and accurate information to area partners, event holders and businesses.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

Tourism

Tourism related promotions relates directly to the Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) Fund that is managed by state law. According to the law, revenue from the municipal hotel occupancy tax may be used only to promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry. See Appendix E. What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes

HOT Event Committee and Application Process

Update the HOT Application on a yearly basis, in September. Revise hotel event questionnaire and distribute to hotels in February. Continue to manage internal HOT Committee and send reports and requests to Council as needed. Council will review most applications in March each year.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

HOT Briefings – Meetings with Seabrook Hoteliers

Convert quarterly HOT Briefing schedule to a biannual schedule that will take place in the fall and spring each year. Work with CVB to organize and co-host meeting.

Target Completion Date: November 2014

HOT Biannual Report

Generate Biannual Marketing Report for Council review. The report will include all promotional and advertising activities plus updates from HOT Briefing meetings and HOT events.

Target Completion Date: March 2015

Economic Development

The City of Seabrook collaborates directly with the Seabrook Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) to attract and retain businesses. Businesses and developers receive correspondence from the city, which is timely, accurate and reliable. The SEDC website is maintained and updated by the Communications and Marketing Department.

EDC Annual Advertising Campaign

Each year under the direction of the Economic Development Director, the Communications and Marketing Department submit advertisements to selected business journals and publications. Advertisements must preserve the City's image.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

Buy Local

Each year the Communications and Marketing Department will assist the Economic Development Director in creating a Buy Local coupon book and online coupon directory.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

Major Project Information Release

As needed the Communications and Marketing Department will release information to the media and the public in regards to major development projects, such as the Expansion of State Highway 146.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

Quarterly Marketing Report

The Communications and Marketing Department will give a quarterly marketing report the encompasses all EDC communications and marketing related activities and website analytics. Reports will be due at the beginning of March, June, September and December and will contain information regarding the previous three-month time period.

Tactic Complete and Ongoing

9. Emergency Communication

The Communication and Marketing Department works closely with Emergency Management to ensure citizens and businesses are notified in the case of an emergency or crisis.

Objective

Develop an Emergency Communication Strategy to help communicate to the public during an emergency or crisis event.

This objective will help attain several of the Communications and Marketing Department Goals outlined on page 4 of this document.

Tactics

The conceptual actions below will aid in completing the above objective.

Target completion dates are subject to change.

FEMA Training

As required by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and the City of Seabrook the Director of Communications also referred to as the Public Information Officer (PIO) during an incident, is required to complete the following National Incident Management System (NIMS) courses (Fall 2014):

- IS 100.b – Introduction to Incident Command System - *Complete*
- IS 200.b – ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents - *Complete*
- IS 300 – Intermediate ICS for Expanding Incidents
- IS 400 – Advance ICS
- IS 700.a – National Incident Management System (NIMS) an Introduction
- IS 701.a – NIMS Multiagency Coordination System (MACS) Course
- IS 702.a – NIMS Resource Management
- IS 703.a – NIMS Resource Management
- IS 704 – NIMS Communications and Information Management
- IS 800.b – National Response Framework, An Introduction

Target Completion Date: February 2015

Emergency Preparedness Publication and Workshop

Each spring in collaboration with the Office of Emergency Management the Communications and Marketing Department will help promote a Hurricane Preparedness Workshop for the community of Seabrook. In addition to the workshop, the departments will partner to create an informative brochure that will be mailed to the residents of Seabrook on how to prepare for a hurricane and/or an emergency event.

Target Completion Date: May 2015

Priority Notification System Policy and Procedure

Develop policy, guidelines and procedures that will assist staff who utilize the City's Priority Notification (Blackboard CTY).

Target Completion Date: December 2016

Promotion of Priority Notification System

Develop a “How to Register” video that will be the primary media asset (in addition to emails and flyers) of a social media campaign which will encourage citizens and businesses to register for our Priority Notification System.

Target Completion Date: April 2015

10. Appendices

The included appendices are referred throughout the Comprehensive Communication Plan.

Appendix A. City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines

The City of Seabrook logo is a trademark of the City of Seabrook and in order to protect and maintain the city’s image and brand City Council approved the City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines, which gives specific instructions on how the logo may be used and displayed.

Appendix B. City of Seabrook Information Experts

An outline of current city staff that are considered city spokespersons and subject matter experts.

Appendix C. Publication Request and Media Relation Guidelines

Communications and Marketing Department policy on how and when to submit information for publication and release to the media; also included is Media Interaction Guidelines offering tips and suggestions on how to approximately communicate with the media.

Appendix D. Guidelines, Best Practices and Social Media Policy for the City of Seabrook, TX

Approved by Council in February 2012 these guidelines and policies are intended to assist city staff who use social media as a communication tool to encourage social media use between the City, and its citizens and business.

Appendix E. What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes

This abridged version of the THLA’s What Cities Need to know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Tax gives an overview of how HOT funds can be allocated to promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry.

City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines

The Logo

The City of Seabrook logo and colors are key elements for establishing and maintaining the identity of the City of Seabrook. It needs to be used appropriately and consistently across all printed and on-screen applications. It is important the logo retains its intended shape, form and color. Therefore, it is imperative that no attempts be made to modify or recreate the logo under any circumstances.

The following guidelines should be followed whenever creating printed or on-screen pieces that will be branded with the City of Seabrook logo.



Color



The accurate use of color must be maintained to ensure consistent control of the logo. Color reproduction is Pantone 2965C.

The logo may also be reproduced in True BLACK or True WHITE.

A color palette has been provided to cross-reference when creating documents that does not allow the Pantone color to be chosen. The conversion includes RGB, CMKY, and HEX numbers. A slight variation may exist when entering these numbers and if you have a question or concern please contact LeaAnn Dearman at 281-5777 or via email at ldearman@ci.seabrook.tx.us.

Pantone 2965C	
CMYK = 100 – 38.04 – 0 – 63.2	
RGB = 0 – 49 – 81	
HEX = 003151 (003355 web safe)	

True Black	
CMYK = 75 – 68 – 67 – 90	
RGB = 0 – 0 – 0	
HEX = 000000	

True White	
CMYK = 0 – 0 – 0 – 0	
RGB = 255 – 255 – 255	
HEX = ffffff	
<i>Please note the clouds may also be Pantone 2965C instead of black.</i>	
	

Background Control

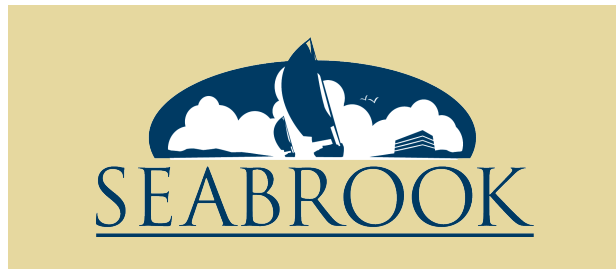
The logo should only be used as shown, in the approved color options. The preferred background is white. If white is not a background option the logo should maintain a transparent background and the color background should be a light shade and not dark.

The exception to the white or light shaded background is when the logo is printed in white. Dark color backgrounds may be used when a dark background is chosen.

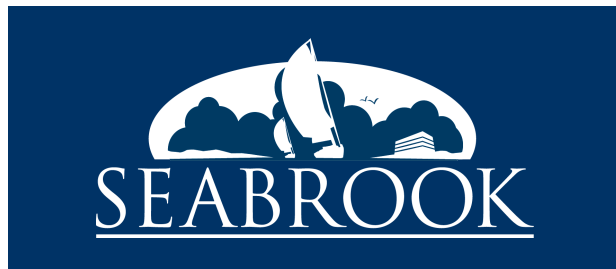
- ✓ White Background



- ✓ Light Background



- ✓ Dark Background



Rule of Thumb

The True BLACK logo may be used on any light colored background, while the True WHITE logo may be used on darker colors.



Space and Positioning

A clear space is defined to maintain the logo's integrity. If the minimum clear space is not applied, the logo's impact will be compromised.

Do not allow any graphic or text elements such as copy, photography, clipart and background patterns to clutter the clear space surrounding the logo.

This includes positioning the logo close to the edge of documents.



Size and Proportions

To ensure legibility, the logo may not be reproduced less than 2.0 inches in width for printed materials.

For electronic media (on-screen), it is important to maintain consistency when presenting the logo on the Internet, on a CD ROM or other types of media. The minimum size for the logo is 150 pixels wide.

Distortion of the logo is NEVER permitted. The logo must maintain proper proportions; never stretch or distort the logo in any way.

✓ Print Materials



✓ Electronic Media



✓ Correct Proportions



X Incorrect Proportions



Incorrect Usage

Color Manipulation

The logo colors should not be manipulated in anyway other than as indicated by this document. Only the approved color combinations are permissible.

X Examples of Incorrect
Color Combinations



Element Manipulation

Logo elements should not be manipulated in anyway.

X Examples of Incorrect
Element Manipulation



Business Cards

There is one format for the City of Seabrook business cards. The official City logo as seen in this document will be used to brand all business cards. No variation of this format will be allowed.

The following information for business cards should be provided to Purchasing:

Name (First, Last)

Title

Office Phone

Cell Phone (optional)

Fax Number

Address

Email address



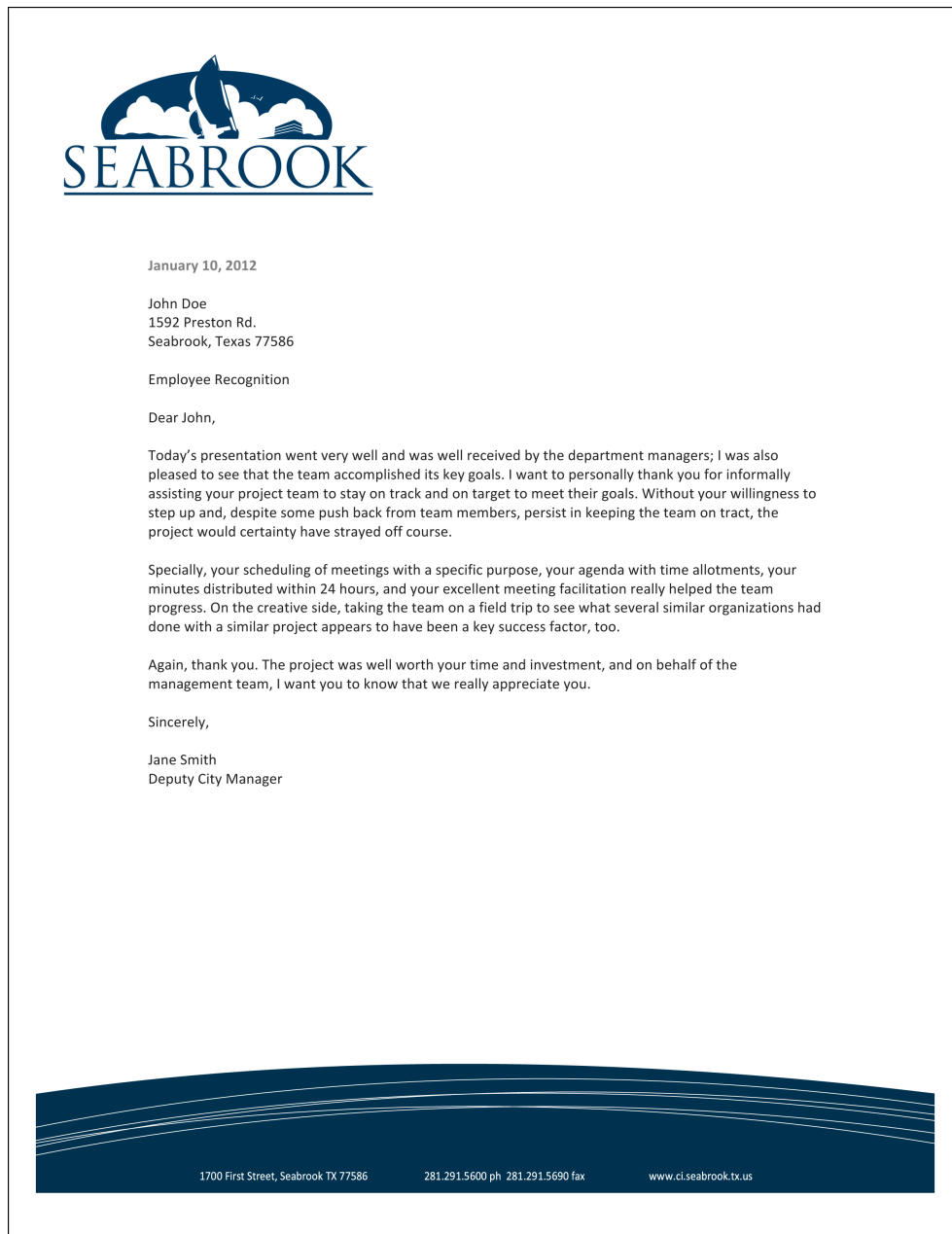
Font

Calibri at 9 points, in black; name is bold.

Letterhead and Memos

Perhaps no document leaves a more lasting impression than written correspondence. The look of the letterhead reinforces the importance of your message. Letterhead may be ordered in bulk to save in cost. Bulk letterhead is not customized to specific department/employee.

The letterhead format may also be used as both internal and external memos and is available in a digital Word document. Departments and employees may personalize this digital document in regards to phone numbers, email and address. Please avoid alerting the font type or size of this document.



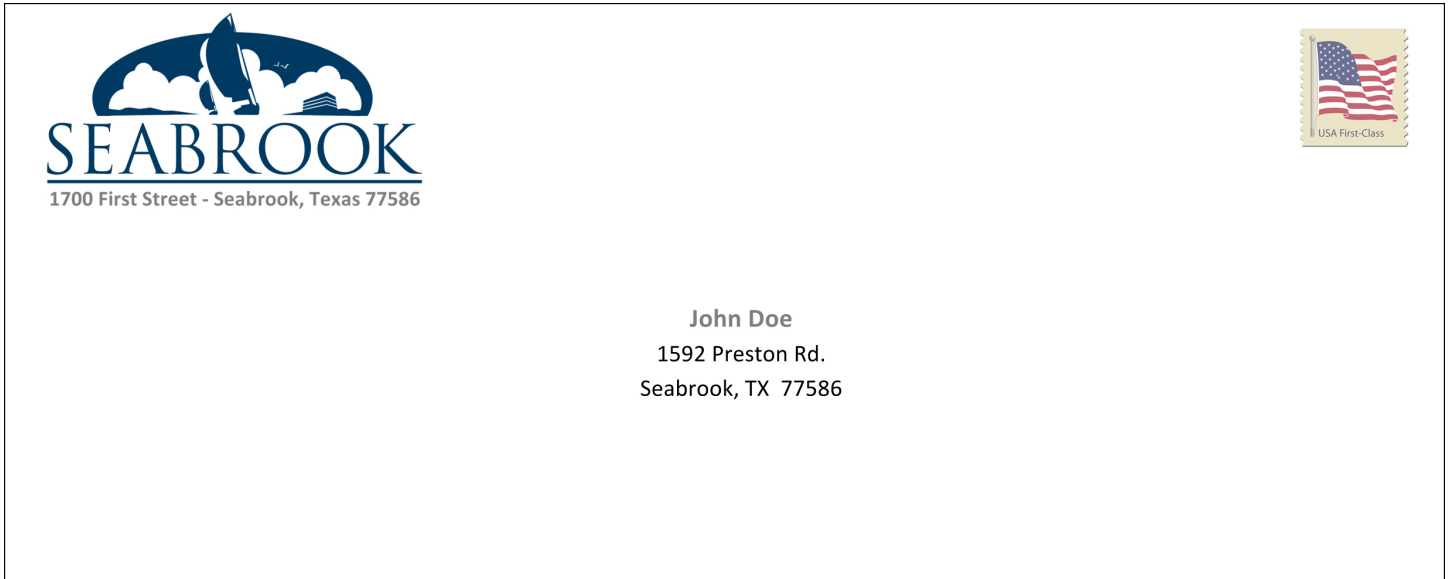
Font

Font is Calibri at 10 points.

Envelope

When an envelope with the City logo is received in the mail, it will be immediately identified as a City document.

There is one format for the City of Seabrook envelope. No variation is allowed.



Font

Return address is bold Calibri at 9.5 points. Recipients name is bold Calibri at 12 points in gray. Recipient address is Calibri at 12 points in black.

Clothing and Promotional Items

Items such as shirts and coffee mugs are important reflections of the City of Seabrook's identity. Each item is a visual reminder of our organization.

Shirts

For embroidery purposes, all threads must be matched as closely as possible to the colors stated in this manual.

Logo size on casual wear is 2.5 inches wide. This does not apply to shirts worn as uniforms. The logo on work shirts should be 3 inches wide.

All logos on shirts will appear on the front upper left side.

Other Items

For other promotional items such as pens, coffee cups, etc., please ensure proper use of logo, size, color and proportions. Any items in violation of these guidelines are not permissible.

City of Seabrook Information Experts

Key Spokespersons	Position	Name	Email Contact	Office Number	Cell Number
Primary Writer/Spokesperson/Communicator	Director of Communication	LeaAnn Dearman	ldearman@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5777	(432) 230.2616
Primary Spokesperson	City Manager	Gayle Cook	gcook@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5688	(281) 638.2384
Secondary Spokesperson	Assistant City Manager	Sean Landis	slandis@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5705	(281) 309.7234
Major Event Spokesperson	Mayor	Glenn Royal	mayor@seabrooktx.gov	(713) 658.1448	(281) 703.3442
Secondary Major Event Spokesperson	Mayor Pro Tem	Gary Johnson	gjohnson@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 480.7900	(832) 221.4071
Public Safety Spokesperson	Chief of Police	Sean Wright	swright@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5611	(832) 473.4173
Secondary Public Safety Spokesperson	Position Needed	Name Needed			
Subject Matter Experts					
Community Development	Assistant City Manager	Sean Landis	slandis@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5705	(281) 309.7234
CD Alternate	Code Enforcement Officer	Mae Wright	mwright@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5735	Number Needed
Economic Development	Director of Economic Development	Paul Chavez	pchavez@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5730	(832) 547.5721
ED Alternate	Position Needed	Name Needed			
Emergency Management	Emergency Management Coordinator	Jeff Galyean	jgalyean@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5700	(281) 642.2752
EM Alternate	Position Needed	Name Needed			
Finance/Customer Service	Director of Finance	Pam Lab	plab@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5677	(281) 714.9201
Finance/CS Alternate	Accounts Manager	Michael Gibbs	mgibbs@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5732	
Human Resources	Director of Human Resources	Joyce Bice	jsanchez@seabrooktx.gov	Number Needed	Number Needed
Human Resources	Human Resources Specialist	Joyce Bice	jbice@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5680	Number Needed
Legislative/City Council	City Secretary	Michele Glaser	mglaser@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5663	(281) 507.5139
Leg/CC Alternate	Deputy City Secretary	Meredith Brant	mbrant@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5736	(281) 389.5978
Municipal Court	Court Administrator	Jessica Ancira	jancira@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5665	(281) 793.6839
MC Alternate	Assistant Court Administrator	Karen LeMay	klemay@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5733	Number Needed
Public Safety/Police	Chief of Police	Sean Wright	swright@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 291.5611	(832) 473.4173
PS/PD Alternate	Position Needed	Name Needed			
Public Works	Director of Public Works	Arthur Chairez	achairez@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 474.3286	(281) 960.1453
PW Alternate	Assistant Director of Public Works	Kevin Padgett	kpaddgett@seabrooktx.gov	(281) 474.3286	(281) 932.2045

*Refer all Fire related questions to Seabrook Volunteer Fire Department Chief Ray Cook or SVFD mainline.

This list will be updated as needed

CITY OF SEABROOK, TX
PUBLICATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS GUIDELINES



Introduction

Communication is a key component that is essential in achieving the City of Seabrook's Vision.

Transparency promotes accountability and provides information for citizens and stakeholders about the City of Seabrook activities and happenings. The City of Seabrook strives to ensure the public's trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation and collaboration. Timely, reliable and accurate communication is an integral part of achieving transparency.

City of Seabrook Vision Statement

Seabrook is a sustainable, energetic and beautiful coastal community that embraces environmental stewardship, fosters safe neighborhoods and promotes tourism and economic diversity.

Communication and Marketing Department

The City of Seabrook Communications and Marketing Department was created by city management and council in January 2012 when it became necessary to have qualified staff manage the city's communication efforts. Currently staff is limited to one person who collaborates with city departments.

City of Seabrook Communications and Marketing Department's mission is to inform and engage citizens, businesses and visitors by providing and responding with timely, reliable and accurate information.

City's Image

The City of Seabrook strives to establish and maintain a positive municipal image and identity. The City of Seabrook logo and colors are key elements for establishing and maintaining the identity of the City of Seabrook. The logo must be used appropriately and consistently across all printed and on-screen applications. It is important the logo retains its intended shape, form and color. Therefore, it is imperative that no attempts be made to modify or recreate the logo under any circumstances.

The City of Seabrook Logo Guidelines were reviewed and approved by Council on in February 2012. A logo CD and copy of the guidelines are available upon request.

Communication Consistency

It is essential to communicate information and news both internally and externally in a timely, reliable and accurate manner. In order to achieve communication consistency city staff must work together and keep each other informed of what is happening at all times.

Internal Communication

Information disseminated to the media and public must originate from subject matter experts. When necessary subject matter experts may speak with the media. The City of Seabrook Communication System outlines the primary and alternate staff needed for information

dissemination. Below is a list of key city personnel and subject matter experts. An additional document is included in the CPC that contains contact information for personnel.

Key Spokespersons	Position	Name
Primary Writer/Spokesperson/Communicator	Director of Communication	LeaAnn Dearman
Primary Spokesperson	City Manager	Gayle Cook
Secondary Spokesperson	Assistant City Manager	Sean Landis
Major Event Spokesperson	Mayor	Glenn Royal
Secondary Major Event Spokesperson	Mayor Pro Tem	Gary Johnson
Public Safety Spokesperson	Chief of Police	Sean Wright
Secondary Public Safety Spokesperson	Position Needed	Name Needed
Subject Matter Experts		
Community Development	Assistant City Manager	Sean Landis
CD Alternate	Code Enforcement Officer	Mae Wright
Economic Development	Director of Economic Development	Paul Chavez
Emergency Management	Emergency Management Coordinator	Jeff Galyean
EM Alternate	Position Needed	Name Needed
Finance/Customer Service	Director of Finance	Pam Lab
Finance/CS Alternate	Accounts Manager	Michael Gibbs
Human Resources	Human Resources Director	Jose Sanchez
HR Alternate	Human Resources Specialist	Joyce Bice
Legislative/City Council	City Secretary	Michele Glaser
Leg/CC Alternate	Deputy City Secretary	Meredith Brant
Municipal Court	Court Administrator	Jessica Ancira
MC Alternate	Assistant Court Administrator	Karen LeMay
Public Safety/Police	Chief of Police	Sean Wright
PS/PD Alternate	Position Needed	Name Needed
Public Works	Director of Public Works	Arthur Chairez
PW Alternate	Assistant Director of Public Works	Kevin Padgett

Media Relations

The City of Seabrook desires to maintain consistent communication with the public through various information outlets, marketing tools, and positive media relations. To ensure city policies and programs are clearly and consistently communicated to the media, all media relations on behalf of the City of Seabrook employees are coordinated through the Director of Communications. However, given the nature of your positions, department managers members may at times receive interview requests directly from the media.

Department managers should recognize that the news media are an important link between the city and the public. Therefore Seabrook City department managers must establish a professional working relationship to help maintain a well-informed and educated citizenry.

- If approached or contacted by the local media please inform the Director of Communications about your interview.
- The Mayor is the designated spokesperson representing Council and matters regarding policy decisions. Council members may defer media inquiries directly to the Mayor.
- The City Manager or Director of Communications is the official spokesperson for all other city related issues. The City Manager may designate management staff to speak on his/her behalf.
- All City press releases should be routed through the Director of Communications for distribution. The director is responsible for maintaining an accurate contact list for all local media outlets that may cover Seabrook. In order to insure all media outlets are treated fairly, news releases should be submitted to the Director of Communications for review and distribution
- When submitting press releases, please pay attention to news deadlines. Ideally all information should be submitted one week prior to release. See below for more information.

Remember to...

1. Call the Director of Communications.
2. Prepare for an interview. You don't have to talk to the media at the very moment someone calls you or puts a camera into your face. It is okay to say "I am not able to talk at this moment, but let's set up a time to talk about this."
3. Keep your answers short and simple. The average sound-bite is 5 to 15 seconds. In most cases, that is what will be used on radio and TV. Even print reporters use one or two sentence quotes.
4. Focus on 2 to 3 talking points. Know the subject of an interview in advance and why the reporter wants to interview you. Know the main points that YOU want to communicate. Continually reinforce these points during the interview by bridging the conversation back to your main points.
5. Tell the truth.
6. Listen to the reporter's question before responding.
7. Pause and think before you answer.
8. It is best to say "I don't know" when you don't know. Then follow by saying you will find out.
9. Check your appearance.
10. Pay attention to news deadlines by quickly responding to media requests.

Also be sure you never...

1. Don't lie – EVER!
2. Do not go "off the record". While many members of the media have high levels of integrity and ethics, do not trust them to keep their word. One bad experience can be catastrophic. Remember words that are not said, cannot be quoted.
3. Do not say "no comment", but be sure to say something. Instead say something like... "I am not able to comment on a pending lawsuit".
4. Don't say anything you wouldn't want on the Evening News or Page 1. Comments can be taken out of context and cause problems. Be especially cautious about humor, sardonic asides, sarcasm, or word play. It is never appropriate to use personal slurs or swear words when talking to the media.
5. Don't speculate, offer personal opinions, or speak beyond your expertise. Questions about third parties should be referred to the third party. Beware of questions that begin with "What if..."
6. Don't use jargon.
7. Don't play favorites.
8. Don't ignore media calls.
9. Don't become angry or provoked. Always be polite and remain calm. Council members should remember that they represent the city and should conduct themselves accordingly. Even if a reporter is hostile, remain calm and in control.
10. Do not disclose confidential information. Refer questions about confidential information to the CMO. Examples include: medical records, certain personnel records, pending employee discipline, actual proceedings of City Council executive sessions, pending litigation, legal opinions, certain law enforcement records, and matters relating to internal and external security measures.

Publication Request

Local media dictate a strict publication schedule, which results in the need to promote and announce upcoming projects and events in a timely fashion. Outlined below is a schedule for information submissions, which ensures your information will be released to the public and the media in a timely fashion.

News Releases

One of the best ways to inform the public is to send out a news/press release. A news release is a document, typically an email that is distributed to all the local media including the major networks and publications in Houston. The goal is to have the media release the information via their channels and outlets. The media tends to have a greater following of viewers, readers and even social media users. All news releases are also disseminated to the city's email list serves and social media sites.

1 WEEK IN ADVANCE

If you wish to submit information that needs to be released to the press please submit the information to the Communications Department at least one week in advance. Not all publications have the same publication schedule. For example, the Bay Area Observer and The Citizen only publish papers on Thursdays, therefore to be included in their Thursday publication information must be released either the Friday or the Monday before. Layout and design will typically take place on Tuesday and printing will occur on Wednesday.

E-Newsletter

Each month, typically mid month, the Communications Department releases an E-Newsletter. This newsletter is disseminated to the city's list serves, social media sites and also the media. It is a great place to announce upcoming events or feature important topics happening at the city.

1st DAY OF THE MONTH

If you wish to submit information for the monthly E-Newsletter, please get it to the Communications by the 1st day of each month. If the 1st falls on a Saturday or Sunday, please submit it the Friday before.

City Report

In the Spring and Fall of each year the city releases a bi-annual city report. This is a comprehensive report that covers happenings of the previous 6 months plus upcoming events. The report is a high resolution publication and quality photos are needed for its completion. Cameras are available for staff to check out in order to obtain photos.

SPRING DEADLINE MARCH 31

Each department must submit information for the report. All spring items are due the last day of March, no exceptions. The spring report is distributed the first week in May,

FALL DEADLINE AUGUST 31

Each department must submit information for the report. All fall items are due the last day of August, no exceptions. The fall report is distributed the first week in October.

Social Media

Currently the city utilizes various social media platforms to help inform the public. All news releases, e-newsletter and city report content is posted to social media platforms. Creating content for social media is very important so please share any and all ideas with the Communications Department. A copy of the city's social media policy is available upon request.

THE SOONER THE BETTER

As a rule of thumb content for social media needs to be sent out in the moment.

Questions, Comments or Concerns

If you are ever unsure, just ask. All information needs to be routed through the Communications Department.

LeaAnn Dearman
(281) 291.5777 (office)
(432) 230.2616 (cell)
ldearman@seabrooktx.gov



GUIDELINES, BEST PRACTICES AND POLICY FOR
SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR THE CITY OF SEABROOK, TX

February 2012

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1. Introduction

These guidelines and policies are intended to assist city employees who will use social media as a communication tool to encourage social media use between the City, and its citizens and businesses. Given the evolving nature of social media, this document will be reviewed and updated periodically as technologies or law evolve.

Attribution

These guidelines were developed based on the shared experiences and specimens from other cities and organizations; in particular, the Social Media Policy of the Seabrook Economic Development Corporation.

2. Purpose

Social media offers City of Seabrook employees the opportunity to interact with the public in new, exciting ways that facilitate transparency, interactivity and collaboration. These tools engage audiences differently than traditional media and enhance communication strategies.

The City of Seabrook encourages the use of social media to advance the goals of the city and the missions of its departments, where appropriate.

The purpose of this guideline/policy is to assist the employees of the City of Seabrook on how to effectively and responsibly navigate issues unique to social media. This includes the management and development of social media tools, content, restrictions and limitations.

The definition of social media is web-based applications that facilitate information sharing and collaboration such as web-based communities, social networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs and others.

City staff or authorized employees responsible for developing, maintaining, and monitoring social media applications shall be designated by the City Manager. The City Manager shall be the final authority on content published to social media applications.

3. Applicability

These guidelines and policies are applicable to all City of Seabrook employees, elected and appointed officers, officials, and to all members of City boards and commissions who utilize any social media directly or indirectly on behalf of the City. This policy also applies to all City of Seabrook personnel who personally utilize any social media or other Internet activity that may impact the City's credibility, reputation, employee morale, services or goals of the City of Seabrook.

These guidelines apply without regard to whether the use of social media occurs during working or non-working time, or on duty or off duty use. Similarly, the policy applies regardless whether city equipment or city time is used.

4. Acceptable Uses and Restrictions

The best and most appropriate uses of social media for the City of Seabrook generally fall into two categories:

- As a channel for disseminating time-sensitive information as quickly as possible.
- As a mechanism for communication between the City of Seabrook and members of the public, and more directly, its residents and businesses.

City staff representing the City of Seabrook on City social media sites and applications in the course of their assigned duties and responsibilities are bound by existing city policies and standards, including but not limited to:

- Applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations, ordinances, charter provisions and City policies, (E.g. Title VII, nondiscrimination, harassment, etc.)
- All information and technology security guidelines, procedures and policies.
- Existing City standards of conduct, ethics, rules and policies
- The Texas Public Information Act and e-discovery laws and policies (requiring content to be managed, stored and retrieved and open to public inspection and disclosure).
- Applicable state records-retention laws and City schedules for retention.

Personal Responsibility

All city employees must be cognizant that how they present themselves on social media applications reflects on the City whether with respect to city social media sites or personal ones. Public and private or personal and professional avenues of communication may easily become blurred and result in inappropriate use or content.

In all applications, the following shall apply:

Confidentiality

Employees will not post or use proprietary, confidential, sensitive or individually identifiable information or divulge city intellectual property (trademarks, copyrights, or patents) in any social media applications.

Disclaimers

If employees refer to or identify themselves as city employees on social media applications, use of a disclaimer is mandatory. (e.g. "While I work for the City of Seabrook, anything I publish is my personal opinion and not the opinion or position of the City of Seabrook, or a reflection of the City's policies).

Personal vs. Professional Use

Employees' personal social media sites should remain personal in nature and should not be comingled or used for work-related purposes or to conduct official City business.

Employees should not use their city e-mail account or password when accessing personal social media accounts. Personal and City social media accounts should not be synchronized for dual access or reference purposes.

Use of City Resources

Employees may use city-owned assets and equipment or resources (computers and cell phones) to access social media sites (personal or City sites) on a limited basis. Department directors will determine the level of access assigned to authorized users and the limits of non-business use in their respective departments.

Ethical Obligations

City ethical rules must be followed at all times, even when employees engage in social media use in their personal capacities.

Professional Responsibility

All city-related communication through social media applications should remain professional in nature and should be conducted in accordance with the city's communications policy, practices and expectations. Employees are expected to use good judgment and take personal and professional responsibility for any content they publish via social media.

All employees who use social media applications must:

Authorization

Not access social media sites or other online forums on behalf of the City unless authorized by appropriate city management.

Identify Yourself Clearly

When creating or using social media accounts that require individual identification, authorized users speaking on behalf of the city should identify themselves, if possible, by: 1) full name; 2) title; 3) department; and 4) contact information, when positing or exchanging information on social media forums. Unauthorized use of an authorized

employee's identification or access credentials/information is a violation of this policy and will be disciplined accordingly.

No Privacy Expectation

Employees should have no expectation of privacy as to information stored on city computers, networks, databases or devices. Furthermore, there should be no expectation of privacy regarding any communications between any City employee and the public when the employee is in course and scope of performing his/her assigned duties

Authorized Use

Only authorized City employees may moderate City developed social media applications and sites on behalf of the city. Authorized employees must support the City's missions and goals in doing so.

Communication Quality

Authorized employees should use good judgment and accuracy in all City social media communications. Errors and omissions reflect poorly on the City of Seabrook and may result in liability for the City. In addition to the Professional Responsibilities listed above, authorized city staff should refrain from any social media activity that is inconsistent with, or that reasonably could be expected to negatively impact the City of Seabrook's reputation or standing in the community. Employees are cautioned to be respectful and professional to everyone, including fellow personnel, organizations, residents, and businesses.

When drafting a communication, make sure that it:

- Has a clear purpose
- Speaks well to the reader
- Is clear and concise without unnecessary verbiage
- Provides value to the reader
- Uses proper spelling, grammar, syntax and punctuation
- Is positive and informative
- Offers links, pictures or references opportunities for more information, where reasonable
- Has benefit to both the city and public

In addition to the suggestions above, best practices on how to be a good citizen of the social media environment include:

Be responsible

All statements made about the City in any social media site, whether personal, private or official, reflect upon the City, its employees, services and elected City officials. Each employee will be held accountable for all posts made officially in City media sites or personally on City media sites or in personal social sites. Once published, a communication can never be totally eliminated from the web, even if withdrawn. Defamatory or disparaging statements about the City, its agents, employees or services made on personal or private social media sites are no less a reflection on the City and serve as a basis for lack of accountability against any employee who violates these guidelines.

Be honest and transparent

Dishonesty, deceit, and untruthfulness are quickly noted in the social media environment and have a deleterious effect on the City. Therefore, all representations made on City media sites must be clear, accurate, complete, thorough and truthful.

Correct errors quickly

Any mistakes should be admitted as directly as feasible. Omissions, misleading entries or misrepresentations must be corrected as soon as they are recognized or brought to the City's attention. Correct information will be quickly provided with appropriate modifications and disclaimers, if necessary or helpful to clear up any misunderstanding or confusion.

Be respectful of the reader and the audience

Social media publications should only be made when the City and/or the public would benefit by the publication. Value must be added. Communications from the City should assist the public and build a co-beneficial relationship and rapport with the City and its agents. This could include, among other things, thought provoking articles that build a sense of community, improve knowledge or skills, enhance business development, enable problem solving, increase awareness of city sources and resources and encourage mutually beneficial platforms for employees to provide better, more efficient city services.

Stay within your area of expertise or authority

All information posted on City sites must be authorized and appropriate. Employees should only publish information within their own area of expertise and not speculate, guess or assert personal opinion or commentary unless approval is authorized by appropriate city management.

Respect proprietary information, content, privacy and confidentiality

For any non-original work, proper credit must be attributed. No copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets or other proprietary matter may be published without prior written

approval, licenses obtained, permits and fees paid and/or proper attribution made within the publication itself. Links may be referenced to others' work rather than reproducing it on the City site. Employees' or city officials' names and/or likenesses may be used only with permission from such person to post on the site. All publications that include City intellectual property of any kind must be safeguarded with appropriate disclaimers and notices to prohibit the unauthorized use or performance of such proprietary matters.

Respond quickly

All communications requiring a reply or response shall be made in a timely manner in accordance with these guidelines.

Be sociable, courteous and respectful

In all communications, employees should use plain language and avoid using government jargon or acronyms. Use content that is open-ended and invites a response, or encourages comments. Responses should always be polite and respectful, even if the original response is not. When shortening words to maximize communication, utilize commonly used shorthand terms, letters and symbols.

Abide by social media rules

Employees utilizing social media sites shall abide by the site's terms of service or terms of use. Before utilizing the site, each employee shall become acquainted with each site's terms and conditions of use or rules for services and follow them as directed. No employee is authorized to abuse a social media site and shall be accountable for any abuse, misuse or violations of such terms or rules of engagement.

Prioritize your participation

Authorized employees shall use social media sites only as approved and should not linger longer than necessary. Duration of use shall be commensurate with job duties and responsibilities and only as long as necessary to complete City business.

Restrictions and Prohibitions

Users and visitors to the City of Seabrook social media sites will be notified that the intended purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the City of Seabrook and the public. Although free speech and cross - communication is encouraged, there are certain topics and issues that are NOT allowed on City of Seabrook social media sites comments, links and uploads. By way of example, these include, but are not limited to:

- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Profane language or content. Abusive or disparaging comments directed at individual(s).

- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status or lack thereof, socio-economic status of individual(s), national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Sexual expression, discrimination, harassment or content of any kind or links to sexual content or pornography whether of an adult, minor or child.
- Any expression of conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or the City's public safety systems
- Any expression of words that would disparage right, title or interest of a legal ownership of any other individual or business.
- Comments that do not pertain to the topic under discussion; including comments containing links to other websites or pages which are not relevant to the topic under discussion
- References to or inappropriate characterizations of individuals including personal attacks upon any member of the public, City employee or City official.
- Advertising or promotional announcements of private or commercial enterprises, even if not for profit unless the City is co-sponsoring such activity or event. Only City business related advertising (services) or promotional announcements (special events) are allowed.
- Individually identifiable information (e.g. address, phone number and social security numbers) of specific individuals be they City employees, officials or members of the public.

The City of Seabrook reserves the right to restrict or refuse to re-publish any content that is deemed in violation of these guidelines or any applicable federal, state or local law(s), including the terms of service or terms of use outlined by third-party social media application providers. The City of Seabrook reserves the right to block users who violate these terms.

Monitoring

Social media is an engaging medium and welcomes two-way and cross conversations, giving the City of Seabrook the opportunity receive and obtain comments and feedback from users regarding how the City is perceived, what it is doing right and what users think might be wrong or done more effectively or efficiently.

Monitors enforce this policy and guidelines to ensure content and posted comments are suitable for all readers, while respecting the gamut of opinions and points of view.

Prohibited, negative and/or inappropriate comments from users are to be expected given the deeply felt passion some individuals express about topics close to their hearts. Unacceptable

forms of communication should not become a worrisome issue or treated as a sign of failure in social media strategies and usages. Instead, such comments can be reformed into positive effects, indicating to the online community that the city is professional, engaged in a dialogue with its users and that it values their.

Typical scenarios with suggested outcomes – a guide

Identify the Type of Feedback

The first step in dealing with negative feedback is determining what type of comment has been received. Negative feedback comes in a few different forms, each of which is best dealt with by a different type of response.

Constructive Criticism

Many users will use social media to suggest ways in which the City can improve upon services. While this type of feedback may point out flaws or issues, it can be extremely helpful to receive.

Merited Condemnation

Essentially, the City of Seabrook or one of its agents did something wrong, and someone is unhappy. Again, while this type of feedback is not positive, it can serve as a means to convey information regarding solutions being worked, results achieved and ways that issues have been resolved.

Trolling/Spam

Trolls and spammers will use a negative comment about the City, a political figure or provided service (whether true or false) to promote a competing entity, person or service.

Determine Best Approaches for Response

When responding to criticism, even the negative type, it is important to stay positive. Adding more negativity to the conversation or being drawn into a fight with a customer or user will likely reflect poorly on the organization.

Constructive Criticism

A response is almost certainly necessary. Regardless, if a real problem exists, steps should be taken to remedy the issue, therefore it is important communication occurs between the social media moderator and department handling the problem. Sometimes, this type of feedback is the result of a perceived problem rather than an actual problem (e.g. someone who doesn't like the method by which something was done). This type of complaint should be given a response, if only to say, "Thank

you for bringing it to our attention, but here is why we have this procedure in place."

There will be times when the organization will not want to implement the suggestion given, however, trust will be built by responding to criticism with a positive message.

Merited Condemnation

This can be tougher to deal with, because comments are more likely to feel personal. It is important to keep in mind that this type of feedback, as harsh as it may be, has a basis in a real problem. It is best to respond promptly and with a positive tone (e.g. thank the user for the feedback and assure them that steps are being taken to correct the issue or mitigate their problem).

Trolling/Spam

This is the only category of negative feedback that does not require a response. In fact, it is almost always best not to respond to these messages. This type of feedback isn't really feedback at all. It is best to ignore this variety of feedback, and when appropriate, to remove it as soon as possible from the medium and/or report the user to appropriate application support.

5. Security

City staff needs to take every caution to prevent fraud or unauthorized access to social media applications. In almost every case where an attacker accesses a system without authorization, he/she does so with the intent to cause harm, including:

- Making unofficial posts, tweets or messages that will be seen by the public as official messages.
- Encouraging users to either click links or download unwanted applications that the attacker has added to the site.
- Accessing, compromising or disabling a city system.
- Redirecting users to sites that look like a city site but are used to gather data that could be used for unauthorized purposes (e.g. phishing)
- Using a compromised site to spread malware.
- Acquiring confidential information about city employees or citizens (e.g. social engineering).

How to Mitigate Security Risks

Security related to social media is fundamentally a behavioral issue, not typically a technology issue. In general, employees unwittingly providing information to third parties

pose a risk to the city network. Employees need to be aware of current and emerging threats that they may face using social media sites and how to avoid falling prey. The following are best practices when using social media:

- A separate user ID and password must be used to access social media sites, NEVER use your City Network username and password
- Never duplicate user IDs and passwords across multiple social media sites
- Learn more about security awareness and risks when using social media
- Ensure privacy settings are set appropriately
- Review (and apply as appropriate) patches for Firefox, Adobe and Java as these softwares can be common paths for security vulnerabilities.

6. Records Retention

The following shall apply regarding the retention of City business, information or public records of posts to social media applications and tools:

- All content published and received by the city using social media in connection with the transaction of the city's public business are public records in accordance with the Texas Public Information Act (https://www.oag.state.tx.us/ag_publications/pdfs/publicinfo_hb.pdf)
- The city remains responsible for capturing electronic copies of its public records made or received using social media, including those records made or received using third-party websites. All City employees and users are prohibited from deleting, altering, or in any way destroying, obliterating or tampering with the social media posts once they have been officially entered into the social medium.
- All City employees are responsible for keeping their individual access information confidential and they will be held individually accountable for all entries made under their access data. It is no defense that the computer was accessible to others or that someone else might have tampered, deleted, or made an unauthorized post while the system was accessed by a third party, if the employee left the access open and/or unattended.
- The city retains public records and disposes social media public records in accordance with Texas State Records Retention Schedule (<https://www.tsl.state.tx.us/slrn/recordspubs/rrs4.html>)

7. Disclaimer

These guidelines are intended to supplement - not replace - the City of Seabrook's Personnel Policies. Policies on confidentiality, controversial issues, personal use of city equipment, professionalism, references for former employees, publication of articles, unlawful harassment

and other rules of conduct addressed in other policies are not affected, altered or amended by these guidelines. If not specifically addressed in this policy, an issue often can be clarified by reference to other City of Seabrook policies. Similarly, conduct that violates this policy will be subject to the same action as set forth in City personnel policies and may be disciplined accordingly.

8. Questions, Comment and Concerns

If, at any time, there is an uncertainty about how to apply these guidelines or questions arise regarding participation in social media, all employees are directed to seek the guidance of the City Manager or employee designated by the City Manager responsible for all social media assets. Social media is in a state of constant change and the City of Seabrook recognizes that there will likely be events or issues that are not addressed in these guidelines. Therefore, the responsibility falls to each individual to use good judgment, and when in doubt, to ask for clarification or authorization before engaging in questionable online conduct. Any employee who observes questionable or inappropriate social media conduct or posts whether on City official sites or on personal or private sites that could be a violation of this policy or potentially negatively impact the City of Seabrook, are directed to report this information to the City Manager or employee designated by the City Manager responsible for all social media assets.

Appendix A

As stated in Section 4 of this document, Acceptable Uses and Restrictions: Content, users and visitors must be notified of the intended purposes of Seabrook social media applications. A Social Media User Agreement is to be placed or linked on all social media sites to be executed before access may be allowed.

Social Media User Agreement

In an effort to communicate with a larger audience, the City of Seabrook maintains various types of social media applications. By accessing these applications, you are agreeing to the terms and conditions stated below.

The City of Seabrook intends to promote effective communication and maintain a respectful dialogue with users. In that spirit, the rules for posting external comments and content on Seabrook social media sites should maintain an open forum for community discussion and comment.

The City's social media system is monitored to ensure that posted comments and included content are constructive and suitable for all readers and users, while respecting a wide and unfettered range of opinions and points of view. So that you are advised and comfortable to participate fully, the City of Seabrook social media system's sites, comments, links and uploads containing any of the following prohibited material/matter shall NOT be allowed:

- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures.
- Profane language or content. Abusive or disparaging comments directed at individual(s).
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status or lack thereof, socio-economic status of individual(s), national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Sexual expression, discrimination, harassment or content of any kind or links to sexual content or pornography whether of an adult, minor or child.
- Any expression of conduct or encouragement of illegal activity
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or the City's public safety systems
- Any expression of words that would disparage right, title or interest of a legal ownership of any other individual or business.
- Comments that do not pertain to the topic under discussion; including comments containing links to other websites or pages which are not relevant to the topic under discussion
- References to or inappropriate characterizations of individuals including personal

attacks upon any member of the public, City employee or City official.

- Advertising or promotional announcements of private or commercial enterprises, even if not for profit unless the City is co-sponsoring such activity or event. Only City business related advertising (services) or promotional announcements (special events) are allowed.
- Individually identifiable information (e.g. address, phone number and social security numbers) of specific individuals be they City employees, officials or members of the public.

The City of Seabrook reserves the right to restrict or refuse to publish or re-post any content that is deemed in violation of these guidelines or any applicable federal, state or local law(s), including the terms of service or terms of use outlined by third-party social media application providers. The City of Seabrook reserves the right to block part or all of any given post/repost or to block users who violate these terms.

What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes

Abridged Version

Texas Hotel & Lodging Association

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Editor's Note

This is the abridged version of THLA's *What Cities Need to Know to Administer Municipal Hotel Occupancy Taxes*. A full version of this article, with information including expanded information on hotel tax collection, tax exemptions, and city-specific rules, is available by contacting THLA at 512-474-2996.

Authorized Entities

All incorporated Texas municipalities, including general law and home rule cities, may enact a hotel occupancy tax within the city limits.¹ A city with a population of under 35,000 may also adopt the hotel occupancy tax within that city's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).² Most cities are eligible to adopt a hotel occupancy tax at a rate of up to 7 percent of the price paid for the use of a hotel room.³ If a city adopts the hotel occupancy tax within its ETJ, the combined state, county, and municipal hotel occupancy tax rate may not exceed 15 percent.⁴ Texas has among the highest combined hotel occupancy tax rates of any major metropolitan areas in the nation, with Houston at 17 percent and San Antonio at 16 ¾ percent.⁵

In addition to local hotel occupancy taxes, all lodging properties operating in Texas are subject to a six percent state hotel occupancy tax.⁶ Governed under Chapter 156 of the Texas Tax Code, the state hotel occupancy tax is administered by the Texas Comptroller. Funds from the state six percent hotel occupancy tax flow directly to the Texas Comptroller's office and are largely used for the general governmental operations of the State. A portion of the state hotel occupancy tax revenue also goes toward funding tourism promotion through Texas's ad campaign. Most Texans know this successful ad campaign by its famous tagline, "Texas, it's like a whole other country."

Collecting the Tax

Under the Texas Tax Code, the following businesses are considered "hotels" and are required to collect hotel occupancy taxes from their guests: "Any building or buildings in which members of the public obtain sleeping accommodations for consideration" for less than 30 days, including a hotel, motel, tourist home, tourist house, tourist court, lodging house, inn, rooming house, or bed and breakfast facilities. The Texas Administrative Code also includes "manufactured homes, skid mounted bunk houses, residency inns, condominiums, cabins, and cottages within the definition of a "hotel" if the facility is rented for periods of under 30 days.⁷ Hospitals, sanitariums, nursing homes, dormitories or other non-hotel housing facilities owned by institutions of higher education, and oilfield portable units do not collect the tax.⁸ Subject to various exemptions, the hotel tax is imposed on any "person" who

¹ Tex. Tax Code Ann. § 351.002(a) (Vernon 2011).

² § 351.0025(a).

³ § 351.003(a).

⁴ § 351.0025(b).

⁵ Source: National Business Travel Association 2009 Survey.

⁶ Tex. Tax Code § 156.051.

⁷ Tex. Tax Code § 156.001; 34 Tex. Admin. Code Ann. § 3.161(a)(3) (Vernon 2009).

⁸ Tex. Tax Code § 156.001.

pays for the use of a room in a hotel, including corporations, organizations, and other legal entities. The hotel room must cost \$2 or more per day for the local hotel tax to apply, and \$15 or more per day for the state hotel tax to apply.⁹

A full version of this article, with information including expanded information on hotel tax collection is available by contacting THLA at 512-474-2996.

Exemptions from the Local Tax

Texas law provides certain hotel tax exemptions based on the length of a guest's stay or the guest's affiliation with an exempt organization. Texas law is more permissive for exemptions from the state 6% hotel occupancy tax than it is for local hotel tax exemptions. The state hotel occupancy tax allows for an exemption for the following entities: educational, charitable, and religious entities are often exempt from the state hotel occupancy tax. These entities are *not exempt* from local hotel occupancy taxes.¹⁰

Focusing specifically on the local hotel occupancy taxes, there are primarily four categories of exemptions permitted from municipal and county hotel occupancy taxes:

- 1) **Federal Employees:** Federal employees traveling on official business;
- 2) **Diplomats:** Foreign diplomats with a tax exempt card issued by the U.S. Department of State;
- 3) **High Ranking State Officials:** A very limited number of state officials with a hotel tax exemption card (e.g. heads of state agencies, state legislators and legislative staff, members of state boards and commissions, and state judges); and
- 4) **Permanent Resident/Over 30 Day Stay:** Persons or businesses who have agreed in advance to use a hotel room for more than 30 consecutive days (i.e. the "permanent resident" hotel tax exemption).¹¹

A full version of this article with information including expanded information on tax exemptions is available by contacting THLA.

Penalties for Failure to Report or Collect the Tax

The local hotel occupancy tax statutes provide for specific penalties a city may assess against hotel operators who fail to file the hotel tax collections report, file late or without full payment, or produce false tax returns.¹²

A full version of this article with information including expanded information on hotel tax penalties is available by contacting THLA.

⁹ Tex. Tax Code § 156.051(a); § 351.002(a).

¹⁰ Tex. Tax Code § 156.102.

¹¹ § 156.104.

¹² § 351.004.

Use of Local Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenues

There is a two-part test for every expenditure of local hotel occupancy tax.¹³

Criteria #1: First, every expenditure must DIRECTLY enhance and promote tourism AND the convention and hotel industry.¹⁴

Under the Tax Code, every event, program, or facility funded with hotel occupancy tax revenues must be likely to do two things: 1) directly promote tourism; and 2) directly promote the convention and hotel industry.¹⁵ “Tourism” is defined under Texas law as guiding or managing individuals who are traveling to a different, city, county, state, or country.¹⁶ A “direct” promotion of the convention and hotel industry has been consistently interpreted by the Texas Attorney General as a program, event, or facility likely to cause increased hotel or convention activity.¹⁷ This activity may result from hotel or convention guests that are already in town and choose to attend the hotel tax funded facility or arts or historical event, or it may result from individuals who come from another city or county to stay in an area lodging property at least in part to attend the hotel tax funded event or facility.

If the funded event or facility is not reasonably likely to directly enhance tourism and the hotel and convention industry, local hotel occupancy tax revenues cannot legally fund it.¹⁸ However, it is important to note that events and facilities that do not qualify for hotel occupancy tax funding are often still legally eligible for city funding from most of the other funding sources available to the city (general property tax revenues, general sales tax revenues, franchise fee revenues, etc.). State law is stricter in terms of how the local hotel occupancy tax revenues can be spent.

There is no statutory formula for determining the level of impact an event must have to satisfy the requirement to directly promote tourism and hotel and convention activity.¹⁹ However, communities with successful tourism promotion programs generally award the amount of the hotel occupancy tax by the proportionate impact on tourism and hotel activity incident to the funding request. Entities applying for hotel occupancy tax revenue funding should indicate how they will market the event to attract tourists and hotel guests. If an entity does not adequately market its events to tourists and hotel guests, it is difficult to produce an event or facility that will effectively promote tourism and hotel activity.

A city or delegated entity should also consider whether a funded event will be held in a venue that will likely attract tourists and hotel guests. For example, if an event is held in a local school or community center, it may be less likely to attract tourists than if it is held at a local performing arts venue, museum or civic center. Each community will need to assess whether the facility hosting the function is likely to attract tourists and hotel guests. Similarly, if an event is a community picnic, local parade, educational class, or other similar type of event, it is often not likely to attract tourists and hotel guests, and would likely not be eligible for hotel occupancy tax funding.

¹³ §§ 351.101(a), (b).

¹⁴ §§ 351.101(b).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ § 351.001(6).

¹⁷ See Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. Nos. GA-0124 (2003), JM-690 (1987).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ See generally Tex. Tax Code §§ 351.101(a), (b).

Finally, it is a good practice to utilize a hotel tax application form. THLA has a sample hotel occupancy tax application form and a “post event” form that are already in use by many city governments throughout Texas. For a copy of these two forms, simply call THLA at (512) 474-2996, or email THLA at news@texaslodging.com. These forms pose questions of funding applicants such as “Do you have a hotel room block for your events?” and “What do you expect to be the number of room nights sold for this event?” Additionally, the application asks if the entity has negotiated a special hotel price for attendees of their funded event. If the entity does not find the need to reserve a hotel block or negotiate a special hotel rate, it is not likely that they anticipate their event/s will have a meaningful impact on hotel activity.

Funded entities can also visit with area hoteliers who, in many cases, can provide feedback on whether any of their hotel guests expressed an interest in attending such events or facilities in the past. Hotel front desk and management staff usually know what local events and facilities were of interest to their guests by notes in their reservation systems, requests for directions, information and transportation to such venues by hotel patrons.

After an applicant’s event or program is offered for several years, the applicant should have a reasonable idea as to whether their event or program’s attendance includes a number of tourists and hotel guests. For example, some entities track whether guests are staying at local hotels via their guest registry. Other entities measure potential out-of-town attendance from their ticket sales records or other survey information.

It is important to note that Texas law also provides that the hotel occupancy tax may not be used for general revenue purposes or general governmental operations of a municipality.²⁰ It also may not be used to pay for governmental expenses that are not directly related to increasing tourism and hotel and convention activity.²¹ For example, consider a request to use the hotel occupancy tax to pay for construction of additional lighting, restrooms, roads, sidewalks, or landscaping in a downtown area. These are expenditures for which the city would traditionally use its general revenues. Therefore, such an expenditure would violate the prohibition against using the hotel tax for “general governmental operations of a municipality.”²² It is difficult to argue that such improvements to a non-tourism facility would “directly” promote tourism and hotel activity. At best, one could argue the improvements would “indirectly” enhance tourism and hotel activity—which is not sufficient under the clear language of the Tax Code to qualify for funding from the hotel occupancy tax.

²⁰ Tex. Tax Code § 351.101(b); see also Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. Nos. JM-184 (1984), JM-965(1988).

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

Criteria #2: Every expenditure of the hotel occupancy tax must clearly fit into one of nine statutorily provided categories for expenditure of local hotel occupancy tax revenues.²³

The nine categories for expenditure of the hotel occupancy tax are as follows:

1) Funding the establishment, improvement, or maintenance of a convention center or visitor information center.

This category allows expenditures of the hotel tax for the creation, improvement, or upkeep of a convention center or a visitor information center.²⁴ The term “convention center” is defined to include civic centers, auditoriums, exhibition halls, and coliseums that are owned by the city or another governmental entity or that are managed in whole or in part by the city.²⁵ It also includes parking areas in the immediate vicinity of a convention center facility, and certain hotels that are owned by the city or another governmental entity, or that are managed in whole or in part by the city.²⁶ It does not include facilities that are not of the same general characteristics as the structures listed above.

Texas law specifies that for a facility to be funded as a convention center, it must be a facility primarily used to host conventions and meetings.²⁷ “Primarily used” in this context would arguably mean that more than 50 percent of the bookings for the facility are to host conventions or meetings that directly promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry.²⁸ In other words, holding local resident meetings in a facility would not count toward qualifying the facility as a convention center, but meetings of individuals from out-of-town who in part stay at hotels would qualify.

Simply naming a facility a convention center or visitor information center does not automatically qualify the facility as a “convention center.” The authority to use the hotel occupancy tax for facilities is limited and any such facility must meet the above noted “primary usage” test. For example, general civic buildings such as the city hall, local senior citizen centers or activity centers would not qualify as convention centers that could be funded by hotel tax.

2) Paying the administrative costs for facilitating convention registration.

This provision allows expenditures for administrative costs that are actually incurred for assisting in the registration of convention delegates or attendees.²⁹ This is generally an expenditure for larger cities that hold large conventions, and includes covering the personnel costs and costs of materials for the registration of convention delegates or attendees.

²³ Tex. Tax Code § 351.101(a).

²⁴ § 351.101(a)(1).

²⁵ § 351.001(2).

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*; see generally Tex. Tax Code §§ 351.101(a), (b).

²⁹ Tex. Tax Code § 351.101(a)(2).

3) Paying for advertising, solicitations, and promotions that attract tourists and convention delegates to the city or its vicinity.

This provision allows expenditures for solicitations or promotional programs/advertising directly related to attracting tourists and convention delegates to the city or its vicinity.³⁰ Such expenditures are traditionally in the form of internet, newspaper, mail, television, or radio ads; or solicitations to promote an event or facility. The advertising or promotion must directly promote the hotel and convention industry.³¹ For example, the Texas Attorney General ruled that the local hotel occupancy tax may not be used for advertising or other economic development initiatives or improvements to attract new businesses or permanent residents to a city.³²

In certain cases, a city may be able to use the advertising and promotion category to justify covering the costs of advertising an event that will attract tourists and hotel guests, even though the administrative or facility costs for the underlying event would not qualify for hotel tax funding.³³

4) Expenditures that promote the arts.

This section authorizes the expenditure of local hotel occupancy tax for a variety of art-related programs that also promote tourism and local hotel and convention activity.³⁴ Specifically, it allows funding the encouragement, promotion, improvement, and application of the arts including instrumental and vocal music, dance, drama, folk art, creative writing, architecture, design and allied fields, painting, sculpture, photography, graphic and craft arts, motion pictures, radio, television, tape and sound recording, and other arts related to the presentation, performance, execution and exhibition of these major art forms.³⁵ However, it is not enough that a facility or event promotes the arts; Texas law requires that the arts related expenditure also directly promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry.³⁶

Section 351.101(a) of the Tax Code specifically states that “the municipal hotel occupancy tax may be used only to promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry.” The Texas Attorney General reaffirmed this standard when it held in Opinion GA-0124: “Under section 351.101 of the Tax Code, a municipality may expend its municipal hotel occupancy tax revenue only to promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry,’ and only for the specific uses listed in the statute.” There are many success stories of cities that have partnered with the arts entities to turn one day arts events into multi-day events that can substantially increase tourism and hotel activity. Such partnerships and long term planning can help both foster the arts and grow hotel tax proceeds that can be made available to the arts.

Additionally, the amount of funding a city allocates to the arts category may be limited by statute. See the “Special Rules” section of this guide, starting on page 23.

³⁰ § 351.101(a)(3).

³¹ § 351.101(b).

³² Op. Tex. Att’y Gen. No. JM-690 (1987).

³³ See generally Tex. Tax Code § 351.101(a)(3).

³⁴ Tex. Tax Code § 351.101(a)(4).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ § 351.101(b).

5) Funding historical restoration or preservation programs.

A city may spend a portion of its hotel occupancy tax revenues to enhance historical restoration and preservation projects or activities, or advertising and conducting solicitations and promotional programs to encourage tourists and convention delegates to visit preserved historic sites or museums that are likely to attract tourists and hotel guests.³⁷ Texas law does not limit such funding to structures that are owned by a public or nonprofit entity, or to whether the project is listed on a historic registry, but the city may choose to impose such limitations.

It is not enough that a project or activity event merely be historical in nature; Texas law requires that the historical related expenditure also directly promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry.³⁸ Section 351.101(a) of the Tax Code specifically states that “the municipal hotel occupancy tax may be used only to promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry.” The Attorney General in Opinion GA-0124 (2003) reaffirmed this standard when it held: “Under section 351.101 of the Tax Code, a municipality may expend its municipal hotel occupancy tax revenue “only to promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry” and only for the specific uses listed in the statute.”

Additionally, the amount of funding a city allocates to the historical programs category may be limited by statute. See the “Special Rules” section of this guide, starting on page 23.

6) Funding certain expenses, including promotional expenses, directly related to a sporting event within counties with a population of under 1 million.

This section authorizes a municipality located in a county with a population of under 1 million to use local hotel occupancy tax revenue to fund certain expenses, including promotional expenses, directly related to a sporting event.³⁹ To qualify under this authorization, the sporting event must be one that would “substantially increase economic activity at hotels and motels within the city or its vicinity.”⁴⁰ The statutory authorization also requires that a majority of the participants in the sporting event also be tourists to the area.⁴¹

This category is intended to allow communities to fund the event costs for sporting tournaments that result in substantial hotel activity. For example, if a city had to pay an application fee to seek a particular sporting event or tournament, it could use hotel tax for such an expenditure if the sporting event would substantially increase economic activity at hotels and the city was within a county of under one million population. The requirement that a majority of the participants must be “tourists” is included in the statutory authority to prohibit the use of local hotel tax for sporting related facilities or events are purely local (e.g.; local recreation centers, local little league and parks events, intramural sports, etc.).

³⁷ § 351.101(a)(5).

³⁸ § 351.101(b).

³⁹ § 351.101(a)(6).

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

7) Funding the enhancement or upgrading of existing sports facilities or sports fields for certain municipalities.

Certain statutorily bracketed cities may use local hotel occupancy tax to enhance and upgrade existing sports facilities owned by the municipality.⁴² Acceptable sports facilities include those for baseball, softball, soccer, and flag football.⁴³ The municipality must own the sporting facility, and the municipality must meet one of the following population requirements in the Code. A full version of this article, with information including which cities are eligible for this category, is available by contacting THLA at 512-474-2996.

Texas law further requires that before local hotel tax to be used for this purpose, the sports facilities and fields must have been used a combined total of more than 10 times for district, state, regional, or national sports tournaments in the preceding calendar year.⁴⁴

If hotel tax revenues are spent on enhancing or upgrading a sports facility, the municipality must also determine the amount of “area hotel revenue” generated by hotel activity from sports events held at the hotel tax funded facility for five years after the upgrades to the sport facility are completed.⁴⁵ The area hotel revenues that were generated from sports events at the hotel tax funded facility over that five year period must at least equal the amount of hotel tax that was spent to upgrade the sports facility.⁴⁶ If the amount of hotel tax that was spent on the facility upgrades exceeds hotel revenue attributable to events held at that facility over that five year period, the municipality must reimburse the hotel occupancy tax revenue fund any such difference from the municipality’s general fund.⁴⁷

For example, if a city spent \$400,000 on improvements to its soccer fields, it would have to show at least \$400,000 in area hotel revenue directly attributable to events held at that soccer field over the five year period after the soccer field improvements were completed. If the city could only show \$300,000 in hotel industry revenue due to events held at that soccer field, the city would have to reimburse the city hotel tax with the \$100,000 difference from the city’s general fund.

8) Funding transportation systems for tourists

Often with conventions and large meetings, there is a need to transport the attendees to different tourism venues. In 2007, the Texas Legislature authorized the use of city hotel tax for any sized city to cover the costs for transporting tourists from hotels to and near the city to any of the following destinations:

- the commercial center of the city;
- a convention center in the city;
- other hotels in or near the city; and
- tourist attractions in or near the city.⁴⁸

⁴² § 351.101(a)(7).

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Tex. Tax Code §§ 351.101(a)(7), 351.1076.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ § 351.110(a).

The reimbursed transportation system must be owned and operated by the city, or privately owned and operated but financed in part by the city.⁴⁹ For example, this authority could be used to cover the costs of a city to finance certain private shuttles to operate between the convention center and area hotels and attractions for a large city-wide convention. The law specifically prohibits the use of the local hotel tax to cover the costs for a transportation system that serves the general public.⁵⁰

9) Signage directing tourists to sights and attractions that are visited frequently by hotel guests in the municipality.

In 2009, the Texas Legislature added a statutory category that allows cities to use municipal hotel occupancy tax revenue to pay for signage directing tourists to sights and attractions frequently visited by hotel guests in the municipality.⁵¹ Arguably, this type of expenditure was permissible as “advertising and promotion” prior to this 2009 legislation. However, the Legislature codified this understanding to officially include signage directing tourists to sights and attractions that are frequently visited by hotel guests.⁵²

⁴⁹ § 351.110(b).

⁵⁰ § 351.110(c).

⁵¹ § 351.101(a)(9).

⁵² *Id.*

Administering Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenue Expenditures

Duty of funded entities to provide a list of activities.

All entities (including the city itself) that are directly or indirectly funded by the local hotel occupancy tax are annually required to provide a list of the scheduled activities, programs, or events that will directly enhance and promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry.⁵³ This list is to be provided annually to the city secretary or his/her designee prior to the expenditure of the hotel occupancy tax funding by the funded entity.⁵⁴ An entity may add items to this list at any time, and each city decides the format for providing this information. This documentation requirement does not apply if the entity already provides written information to the city indicating which scheduled activities or events that it offers that directly enhance and promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry. For example, cities that require quarterly or annual reports on the use of hotel tax by hotel tax funded entities would satisfy this requirement if their report addresses the extent to which their events directly promote tourism and hotel activity.⁵⁵

It is important to remember that if an entity does not have any such events or programs reasonably expected to directly promote tourism and the hotel and convention industry, it is not eligible for local hotel occupancy tax funding.⁵⁶ If only a portion of an entity's programs fit this criteria, then only a proportionate amount of that entity's costs should be covered by the local hotel occupancy tax.⁵⁷

Delegating management of funded activities.

The governing body of a city may delegate the management or supervision of programs funded by the hotel occupancy tax by written contract.⁵⁸ This delegation may be made to a person, another governmental entity, or to a private organization.⁵⁹ This delegation is often made to a local arts council, a chamber of commerce, or to the convention and visitors bureau. The municipality shall approve the entity's annual budget prior to delegating the management or supervision of hotel tax funded programs.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the municipality shall require the delegated entity to make periodic reports, at least quarterly, listing the hotel occupancy tax expenditures made by the delegated entity.⁶¹ Additionally, the Code requires that the contracted entity maintain complete and accurate financial records for every expenditure of hotel occupancy tax revenue, and upon the request of the municipality or another person, make the records available for inspection and review.⁶²

An entity with delegated authority to manage hotel tax funded programs undertakes a fiduciary duty with respect to the use of the tax revenue.⁶³ Such entities are also required to maintain the city hotel occupancy tax revenue in a separate bank account that may not be commingled with any other account

⁵³ § 351.108(b).

⁵⁴ *Id.*; § 351.108(d).

⁵⁵ § 351.108(g).

⁵⁶ § 351.101(b).

⁵⁷ § 351.101(e).

⁵⁸ § 351.101(c).

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² § 351.101(d).

⁶³ § 351.101(c).

or funds.⁶⁴ The Tax Code does not contain similar prohibitions against commingling the funds for individual organizations, such as an arts or historical group that receives hotel tax funding for their individual program, but do not themselves oversee hotel tax funding to other entities.

Use of hotel occupancy tax revenues to cover administrative expenses.

Texas law allows proceeds of the municipal hotel occupancy tax to be used to cover the portion of administrative costs that are directly attributable to work on activities that may be funded by the tax.⁶⁵ For example, entities that manage activities funded by the hotel occupancy tax may spend some of the tax for certain day-to-day operational expenses.⁶⁶ These expenses may include supplies, salaries, office rental, travel expenses, and other administrative costs.⁶⁷ However, these costs may be reimbursed only if the expenses are incurred in the promotion and servicing of expenditures authorized under the hotel occupancy tax laws.⁶⁸ The portion of the administrative costs that are covered should not exceed the percentage of the cost that is attributable to the activity funded by the hotel occupancy tax.⁶⁹ For example, administrators who spend 33 percent of their time overseeing hotel occupancy tax funded programs should seek funding for no more than 33 percent of their salary or 33 percent of other related overhead costs. Additionally, hotel occupancy tax revenues may be spent on travel that is directly related to the performance of the person's job in an efficient and professional manner.⁷⁰ This travel should facilitate the acquisition of skills and knowledge that will promote tourism and the convention and hotel industry.⁷¹

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ § 351.101(e).

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ § 351.101(f).

⁷¹ *Id.*

Special Rules for Selected Municipalities

The Texas Tax Code provides additional rules for certain Texas cities based on the city's population brackets. A full version of this article with information on city-specific rules is available by contacting THLA at 512-474-2996.

Additional Information

If a city or funded entity has additional questions about the administration or use of the hotel occupancy tax, it is welcome to contact the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association for assistance by phone at (512) 474-2996. THLA has sample documents available to assist in administering hotel taxes, such as funding grant application forms, post event forms, and tax collection guidelines.

Texas city officials can also make inquiries to the legal staff of the Texas Municipal League at (512) 231-7400. Finally, all entities may make inquiries to the Municipal Affairs Section of the Office of the Attorney General of Texas (OAG). The OAG's Municipal Affairs Division can be reached by phone at (512) 475-4683.

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